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SUBJECT: Copenhagen Accord: First Austrian Reactions

¶1. Last weekend's Copenhagen Accord at COP-15 was bashed in Austria at both ends of the climate spectrum, with scant words of support from GoA leadership. While centrist Chancellor Werner Faymann (a social democrat) called the compromise "an important step forward ... we don't have time to be disappointed, because our next task is to formulate binding emissions reduction goals," Environmental Minister Niki Berlakovich denounced the summit's close as a "black day for climate protection" which failed to reach even a "minimal consensus" on a timetable for negotiating a binding agreement over the next year. Berlakovich called on the UN to restore confidence in the multilateral process. Even Austrian President Heinz Fischer (whose role seldom encompasses foreign policy) called it "disappointing and worrying" that the accord does not include binding targets.

¶2. In media reactions, prominent economist and Embassy contact Stefan Schleicher (a delegate at Copenhagen) said the "paltry" accord falls short even of the Kyoto Protocol 12 years ago. He said the world's "window of opportunity" to limit warming to two degrees Celsius will run out by 2015 -- but without multilaterally supervised, binding emissions reduction targets, no country will have the ambition to take sufficient action. Schleicher called Copenhagen a "dead end" for the multilateral process which means that national states will take on a bigger role -- a duty they are certain to shirk. Schleicher spread blame widely:
-- Danes for overpromoting Copenhagen;
-- the US and China for their hardline diplomacy; and
-- the EU for believing that money can solve all problems.

¶3. Austrian environmentalists also harshly criticized the accord -- but generally refrained from blaming the U.S. in first order. Calling Copenhagen a "humiliating defeat .... which can't be spun" (Greenpeace Austria), NGOs said all major industrial countries (including the U.S. and the European Union) were to blame for the collapse of negotiations and the consequences for people in poorer countries. Austrian Greens spokeswoman Christiane Brunner faulted the EU for not committing to a 30% mitigation target (instead of 20%) without waiting for others to act -- it would have given the summit momentum, she opined.

¶4. Austrian industry also panned the Copenhagen Accord, but for the opposite reason: the lack of binding commitments implies the EU ought to rethink its unilateral policies, they said. Leading industrialists such as Voestalpine CEO Wolfgang Eder and Federation of Austrian Industries Secretary-General Markus Beyrer contrasted the U.S. and Chinese refusal to adopt internationally binding mitigation targets with the EU's existing 20/20/20 mandates. The EU has failed to bring others on board with its "prior concessions" -- now European policy-makers should reconsider Europe's role as "unilateral pioneer on climate protection measures" before more jobs migrate to non-implementing countries. Beyrer: "One assumed that others would follow ... now we see that others won't follow ... we need to focus moral pressure on the biggest emitters -- the US, China, and India -- instead of pressuring ourselves."

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